



MARYLAND DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN RESOURCES
Maryland's Social Services Agency



PRESS RELEASE

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**O'MALLEY BROWN ADMINISTRATION JOINS THE INTERNATIONAL
FIGHT AGAINST WORLD ELDER ABUSE ON JUNE 15, 2010**

Call 1-800-91-PREVENT or 1-800-332-6347 to Report Suspected Elder Abuse

BALTIMORE – A wide range of Maryland state government agencies have joined the International Network to Prevent World Elder Abuse to urge Marylanders to help ensure the safety and well-being of the elderly. The International Network to Prevent World Elder Abuse designated June 15 as the day for all concerned citizens to demonstrate their desire to end elder abuse and neglect by wearing something purple.

“Everyone can become an advocate for the elderly,” said Governor Martin O’Malley. “Too often our seniors suffer in silence and we need to let everyone know that there are services available to fight against abuse and exploitation of this potentially vulnerable population.”

The O’Malley Brown Administration has made strengthening families a cornerstone of the administration by increasing public safety funding by more than \$125 million to help make Maryland families safer. In addition, Governor O’Malley provided families with another tool to protect seniors when he signed the state’s Silver Alert law last year.

The Silver Alert program within the Maryland State Police department provides a system for rapid dissemination of information to locate an elderly person whose whereabouts are unknown, who suffers a cognitive impairment, and whose disappearance poses a credible threat to their health and safety. The Maryland State Police deploys all of its assets, including personnel, hound dogs, helicopters to return the elderly person to safety. There have been seven silver alerts since the implementation of the program.

In 2000, 15 percent of the total population in Maryland was 60 or older and estimates suggest this age group will expand to 25 percent of the total population by 2030. In real numbers, the over 60 population is expected to grow from 801,000 in 2000 to 1.7 million by 2030. The population of those 85 and older will reach 164,700 by 2030.

“As the proportion of older adults increases, we can expect that more individuals will need protection from exploitation, abuse, and neglect. It is important to educate individuals about elder abuse

- Martin O’Malley, Governor
- Anthony G. Brown, Lt. Governor
- Brenda Donald, Secretary

occurrences so they can better protect themselves and others who may be vulnerable,” said Secretary of the Maryland Department of Aging Gloria Lawlah.

Elder abuse cost Americans tens of billions of dollars annually in health care, social services, investigative and/or legal costs, lost income and assets.

A 1998 study conducted by the National Center on Elder Abuse found that more than 500,000 persons aged 60 and over were victims of domestic abuse and that an estimated 84 percent of incidents are not reported to authorities, denying victims the protection and support they need.

Estimates indicate 2.1 million older Americans are victims of some form of abuse by a caregiver or someone known to them. Given the significant underreporting, the Senate Special Committee on Aging estimated that as many as five million older Americans might be victims of abuse, neglect, and/or exploitation every year.

In fiscal year 2009, DHR’s Adult Protective Services (APS) staff conducted nearly 6,000 statewide investigations of abuse, neglect, self-neglect and exploitation. Approximately 3,000 of those investigations resulted in a finding of “indicated.”

“All members of a community should have nothing but respect and appreciation of elderly citizens,” said DHR Secretary Brenda Donald. “No one, young or old, should have to live in fear of being hurt or harmed. Abuse is certainly an international human rights issue.”

Awareness is a vital key in preventing abuse of frail and vulnerable elderly persons. On an individual level, there are some simple but vital steps to reduce the risk.

Family members should encourage their elderly members to:

- Seek professional help for health concerns including drug, alcohol, and depression as needed
- Attend support groups for spouses and learn about domestic violence services
- Plan for their own future. Seek independent advice regarding a power of attorney and a living will. This action will avoid confusion should they become incapacitated
- Stay active in the community and connected with friends and family. This will decrease social isolation associated with elder abuse
- Know their rights. If they engage the services of a paid or family caregiver, they have the right to voice their preferences and concerns.

Signs that there could be a problem are:

- Bruises, pressure marks, broken bones, abrasions, and burns may be an indication of physical abuse, neglect, or mistreatment.

- Unexplained withdrawal from normal activities, a sudden change in alertness, and unusual depression may be indicators of emotional abuse.
- Sudden changes in financial situations may be the result of exploitation.
- Bedsores, unattended medical needs, poor hygiene, and unusual weight loss are indicators of possible neglect.
- Behavior such as belittling, threats and other uses of power and control by spouses are indicators of verbal or emotional abuse.
- Strained or tense relationships, frequent arguments between the caregiver and elderly person are also signs that problems exist.

Most importantly, family members and caregivers must be alert as seniors often suffer in silence. If you suspect a senior is being neglected, abused or exploited, contact your local department of social services, or call 1-800-332-6347 or (1-800-91-PREVENT).

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The Maryland Department of Human Resources is the state's social service provider. The agency collaborates with 24 local jurisdictions to: provide foster care, adoption, and protective services to children; collect and distribute child support payments; provide protective services, case-management, supportive housing, in-home aide services, and respite care to vulnerable adults; and provide temporary cash, food stamps, and medical assistance to families. It also funds programs for homeless persons, refugees, and migrant-workers, victims of crime and women who are displaced, battered, or assaulted. Last year, DHR served 760,000 people in need. In terms of its annual budget, DHR is Maryland's fourth largest state agency.

The Maryland Department of Aging protects the rights and quality of life of older persons in Maryland. The Department administers statewide programs serving senior citizens including advocacy services, health education, housing, information and assistance, in-home services, and nutrition. The Department also monitors and provides technical assistance to a statewide network of nineteen area agencies. Federal and state programming funds are provided by the federal Older Americans Act, the federal Food and Agriculture Act (sec. 700), and State general funds. Area agencies also receive local funds, private donations, and contributions from program participants. Last year, the MDoA's Long Term Care Ombudsman Program received and investigated 688 complaints of abuse in the state's nursing homes and assisted living facilities.